

Professional Learning Communities at Work Institute
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Rick and Rebecca DuFour, both keynote speakers at the conference, spoke powerfully about the need for building a collaborative culture within the professional learning communities in a school. As a teacher who is new to the process of creating learning communities that are focused and planned I appreciated the way in which they broke the process into steps, from the beginning stages to the complex community. I was struck by a quotation in Rick DuFour's presentation, "Collaborative cultures, which by definition have close relationships, are indeed powerful, but unless they are focusing on the right things they may end up being powerfully wrong." Teachers have always collaborated and created informal relationships that strengthen teaching, but collaboration must be focused and sustained to become effective.

The Critical Corollary Questions presented by Rick DuFour are a powerful, yet simple, place for schools to begin to set up teams that will be effective. The questions are as follows:

- What is we expect them (students) to know?
- How will we know when they have learned it?
- How will we respond when they don't learn?
- How will we respond when they already know it?

As I analyze Idaho Arts Charter School and the steps we are taking to create learning communities, I feel encouraged by the progress that we are making. We have spent time aligning our curriculum to not only the state and national standards, but within and across grade levels. We are creating common assessments, both pre and post learning. The Professional Learning Communities at Work Continuum is an invaluable tool for a district to assess the current reality of where our school currently stands, and the session then went on to help school define what their next steps should be. The sessions with Rick and Rebecca DuFour both introduced learning communities and then highlighted how to create, structure, implement, and build strong communities within schools.

I attended a session with Hector Garcia "Small Schools and Singletons: Structuring Meaningful Professional Learning Teams for Every Teacher", which proved to be applicable to our situation in a small school. This session focused on how a teacher can create a learning community in a small school when they are the only teacher in their department or who teachers their particular subject. He also addressed other challenges that small school face. Garcia discussed how the focus for collaborative learning needs to be reduced to common denominators so that the collaboration becomes more than just collegiality.

Another helpful session was "Learning CPR: Creating Powerful Responses When Students Don't Learn". This session focused on intervention strategies within schools and challenged some of the traditional interventions such as remediation, summer school, retention, and special education. The RTI model is an innovative way to focus on

learning at a much earlier stage in a student's development and will transform the way that schools respond to intervention. I was particularly struck with the way in which RTI is timelier and more targeted than current intervention programs. I am encouraged by what Idaho Arts Charter School has already implemented in our RTI program, targeting at an early stage those students who are at risk for failure.

I appreciate the opportunity to attend this conference and the impact that it will have on my teaching as well as the overall learning community in our school. Thank you for the money made available through the grant and the opportunity it afforded.

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